

Publishers' Criteria for the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts and Literacy, Grades K–2

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INTRODUCTION

Developed by the authors of the Common Core State Standards, these criteria are designed to guide publishers and curriculum developers as they work to ensure alignment with the Common Core State Standards in developing reading materials for the early grades.

The criteria articulated below concentrate on the most significant elements of the Common Core State Standards for literacy in kindergarten through 2nd grade and lay out their implications for aligning materials with the standards. They are intended to direct curriculum developers and publishers to be purposeful and strategic in both what to include and what to exclude in instructional material. By underscoring what matters most in the standards, the criteria illustrate what shifts must take place in the next generation of curricula, including paring away elements that distract or are at odds with the Common Core State Standards. These guidelines are not meant to dictate classroom practice but rather to ensure that teachers receive effective tools.

At the heart of these criteria is the belief that reading — in this case, learning to read — is central. In the early grades, this includes due attention to the foundations of reading. The goal for readers of all ages is to be able to understand and learn from what they read and to express such knowledge clearly through speaking and writing about text. Encouraging this expectation from the start is vital to developing purposeful readers who expect what they read to make sense to them.

DOCUMENT ORGANIZATION

This document has three parts: The first articulates criteria that should guide the teaching of reading foundations, the second details the criteria that should guide the selection of texts, and the third outlines criteria for the development of high-quality text-dependent questions and tasks so that students are able to read closely and gain knowledge from texts.

- I. Key Criteria for Reading Foundations**
- II. Key Criteria for Text Selections**
- III. Key Criteria for Questions and Tasks**

I. Key Criteria for Reading Foundations

The Common Core State Standards offer specific guidance on reading foundations that should be observed in curriculum materials to prepare students to decode automatically and read with fluency by the time they finish 2nd grade. The standards articulate a well-developed set of skills and habits that taken collectively lay the foundation for students to achieve competence in reading comprehension. (See pp. 14–16 of the Common Core State Standards for more detail.) Materials aligned with the Common Core State Standards need to provide repeated, regular exposure to and practice opportunities for the full range of foundational skills in and out of classroom settings (through take-home or after-school activities) that are woven into a clear developmental progression.

1. ***Materials must meet the needs of a wide range of students, reinforcing key lessons in concepts of print, the alphabetic principle, and other basic conventions of the English writing system.*** Students come to school unevenly prepared, so materials must have the capacity to meet a range of needs. Materials need to incorporate better designed and more powerful practice—including distributed practice—for all aspects of foundational reading than has typically been offered in basal reading materials. Materials that are aligned to the standards should provide explicit and systematic instruction and diagnostic support in concepts of print, phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, and fluency. While these foundational skills are not an end in and of themselves, they are necessary and important components of an effective, comprehensive reading program designed to develop proficient readers with the capacity to comprehend texts across a range of types and disciplines.

In particular, by the end of kindergarten, students should be comfortable recognizing and writing letters of the alphabet and know the primary sound/symbol relationship for every letter. By the end of 1st grade, they should have sufficient working knowledge of English spelling patterns and conventions to decode regular, one- and two-syllable words, including those with inflections. First graders are also expected to apply their knowledge of English spelling patterns and conventions in writing, so they can produce regular one- and two-syllable words that are phonemically complete and decipherable even if not formally correct. Learning about irregularly spelled words should be distributed across grades in accordance with the language demands of children's texts. Their introduction should begin in kindergarten with very high-frequency grammatical words, including articles, prepositions, and common irregular verbs such as *is* and *do*. Finally, by the time they complete 2nd grade, students should be decoding automatically and reading with fluency.

Because students differ widely in how much exposure and repetition they need to master foundational skills, materials also need to incorporate high-quality parallel activities for those students who are able to reach facility with less repetition. Approaching remediation and extension activities in this parallel way will help teachers resolve one of the central dilemmas of the early elementary classroom — meeting the needs of all learners. Instructional materials should be designed to provide systematic development and practice in these foundational skills without depriving any students of full access to rich complex text.

2. ***Fluency should be a particular focus of materials prepared for 2nd graders.*** Materials should also provide ample opportunities for repeated oral reading (in and out of the classroom) with a variety of grade-level texts that can be easily

implemented, including providing a framework and tools for assessing oral reading accuracy, rate, and expression. Teacher support for fluency instruction should explicitly recognize that reading rates vary with the type of text being read and the purpose for reading. For example, comprehension of texts that are of greater informational density or complexity generally requires slower reading. Instructions should also require students to follow along while text is read aloud by the teacher to achieve fluency. By the end of 2nd grade, it is essential that students be able to read independently with automaticity and flow to ensure that their focus can be freed for comprehension.

3. ***Materials develop academic vocabulary prevalent in complex texts throughout reading, writing, listening, and speaking instruction.*** When they enter school, students differ markedly in their vocabulary knowledge. Materials must address this vocabulary gap early, systematically, and aggressively, or it will expand and accelerate. This means materials must provide opportunities — both in and out of classroom contexts — for instruction that is driven by the diverse vocabulary levels of children and provide more instruction and exercise for students with weaker vocabularies rather than offer them fewer words than their peers.

Of particular importance is building students' academic vocabulary or Tier 2 words. Informational text that carefully sequences content within a domain will greatly support the development of these words while building student knowledge. Aligned materials should guide students to gather as much information as they can about the meaning of these words from the context of how the words are being used in the text, while offering support for vocabulary when students are not likely to be able to figure out their meanings from the text alone. As the meanings of words vary with the context, the more varied the context provided to teach the meaning of a word is, the more effective the results will be. It follows then that materials should require students to think about words: how and why specific words are used, how changing one word can change the meaning of a text, how one word can have varied but related meanings based on context, and why another word might be more appropriate. While instruction should be systematic and varied (i.e., multiple word meanings, morphology, phonology, and orthography), materials should also use games, jokes, puns, and other forms of word play to enhance instruction and develop a sense of excitement about words.

4. ***Materials offer assessment opportunities that genuinely measure progress in the foundations of reading.*** Activities used for assessment should clearly denote what standards are being emphasized, and materials should offer frequent and easily implemented assessments, including systems for record keeping and follow-up. These should include a framework and tools for assessing oral reading accuracy, rate, and expression with a variety of text types when fluency is being measured.

II. Key Criteria for Text Selections

The Common Core State Standards point strongly toward a text-based approach for teaching students how to read, including those students who lag behind in achieving reading facility. To bring all students up to grade-level reading proficiency, the criteria

recommended below emphasize the need to provide *all* students with consistent opportunities to confront and comprehend grade-level complex text.

1. ***Texts for each grade align with the complexity requirements outlined in the standards.*** The Common Core State Standards hinge on students encountering appropriately complex texts at each grade level to develop the mature language skills and the conceptual knowledge they need for success in school and life. In each grade (beginning in grade 1), Reading Standard 10 outlines the level of text complexity at which students need to demonstrate comprehension. This can start in kindergarten or even earlier with complex texts read aloud to students. (Appendix A in the Common Core State Standards gives further information on how text complexity can be measured.)¹ Research makes clear that the complexity levels of the texts students are presently required to read throughout their school careers are significantly below what is required to achieve college and career readiness. Far too often students who have fallen behind are given only less complex texts rather than the support they need to read texts at the appropriate level of complexity. Both these issues must be addressed by selecting complex texts that are grade level appropriate.
2. ***All students, including those who are behind, have extensive opportunities to encounter and comprehend grade-level complex text as required by the standards.*** Complex text, whether accessed through read-alouds or as a group reading activity, is a rich repository to which all readers need access. Complex text contains more sophisticated academic vocabulary, lends itself to more complex tasks, and is able to support rich dialogue. Because students at these grades can listen to much more complex material than they can read themselves, read-aloud selections should be provided for the teachers in the curriculum materials.

Curriculum materials must provide extensive opportunities for all students to engage with complex text as a member of a class, although students whose decoding ability is developing at a slower rate also will need supplementary opportunities to read text they can read successfully without extensive supports. They may also need extra assistance with fluency practice and vocabulary building. Students who need additional assistance, however, must not miss out on essential practice and instruction their classmates are receiving to help them think deeply about texts and gain world and word knowledge. Therefore, remedial materials must be flexible and straightforward enough to be used in alternative settings and times: before and after school, at home, or in after-school programs. In most cases, the persons working with students in such settings will not have as much experience as the primary classroom teachers, and materials must accommodate that fact.

3. ***Text selections are worth reading and re-reading.*** The standards maintain that high-quality text selections should be consistently offered to students because they will encourage students and teachers to spend more time on them than they would on low-quality material. Texts selected for inclusion should be well written and, as appropriate, richly illustrated. This principle applies equally to

¹ A working group is developing clear, common standards for measuring text complexity that can be consistent across different curricula and publishers. These criteria, due out in summer 2011, will blend quantitative and qualitative factors and will be widely shared and made available to publishers and curriculum developers. It is likely that the measurement of some narrative fiction as well as poetry and drama for the time being will have to depend largely on qualitative judgments that are based on the principles laid out in Appendix A and are being further developed and refined.

texts intended for reading aloud and texts for students to read by themselves. (For samples of appropriate quality of selection, see Appendix B of the Common Core State Standards.)

Selections in the early elementary grades must also contain sufficient repetitions of each lesson's words and spelling/sound patterns and should be complemented with associated spelling and writing activities. To be sufficient, materials should provide abundant — and easily available — opportunities to ensure that all students can transfer knowledge of spelling/sound patterns to words not previously seen or studied.

4. ***Materials include a greater volume of informational text.*** The Common Core State Standards call for a much greater emphasis on informational text. Specifically, they call for elementary curriculum materials to be recalibrated to reflect a mix of 50 percent informational and 50 percent narrative text. (See p. 31 of the standards for details on how these two types of texts are defined.) Achieving the appropriate balance between literary and informational text in the next generation of materials requires a significant shift in early literacy materials and instructional time so that equal time and weight are given to scientific and historical text and to literary text. In addition, to develop reading comprehension and vocabulary for *all* readers, the selected informational text materials should build a coherent and self-scaffolding body of knowledge within and across grades. (The example of “The Human Body” on p. 33 of the Common Core State Standards offers one approach.)
5. ***Additional materials markedly increase the opportunity for regular independent reading of texts that appeal to students' interests to develop both their knowledge and joy in reading.*** These materials should ensure that all students have daily opportunity to read and write about texts of their choice on their own during and outside of the school day. Students should have access to a wide range of materials on a variety of topics and genres. These texts should enable students to read broadly to build their knowledge, vocabulary, and experience. Materials will need to include texts at students' own reading level as well as texts with complexity levels that will challenge and motivate students. In alignment with the standards and to acknowledge the range of students' interests, these materials should include informational texts as well as literature.

III. Key Criteria for Questions and Tasks

Materials offered in support of reading comprehension should assist teachers and students in staying focused on the primary goal of instruction: developing proficient decoders and fluent readers so that students are able to read closely and gain knowledge from texts independently. The aim is for students to understand that thinking and reading occur simultaneously. Curricula should focus classroom time on practicing reading, writing, speaking, and listening in direct response to high-quality text and text-dependent questions and omit that which would otherwise distract from achieving those goals.

1. ***Questions are grounded in the text and are worth thinking about and answering.*** Materials that accompany texts should ask students to think about what they have heard or read and then ask them to draw evidence from the text in support of their ideas about the reading. The standards strongly suggest that a majority of questions posed to children be based on the text under consideration.

(This is equally true for read-alouds students listen to and for material students read for themselves.) Materials should be sparing in offering activities that are not text dependent. Whether written or spoken, responses based on students' background knowledge and the experiences they bring with them to school are not sufficient. A proficient answer should require thinking about the text carefully and finding evidence in the text itself to support the response. Discussions tasks, activities, questions, and writings following readings should draw on a full range of insights and knowledge contained in the text in terms of both content and language. Instructional support materials should focus on posing questions and writing tasks that help students become interested in the text, rather than on trying to cajole or entertain students as a prerequisite for asking them to engage with the text.

2. ***Prereading activities start with the text itself.*** Scaffolding, summaries, and stimulant questions that connect the reader to the text ahead of time should not preempt or replace the text by translating its contents for students or telling students what they are going to learn. Students' initial exposure to a text should engage them directly with the text so they can begin to make meaning for themselves. Students should be able to glean the information they need from multiple readings of a text. These multiple readings may include initially having a text read to them by the teacher while students follow along in the text with successive independent readings completed by the students. In particular, aligned curriculum should explicitly direct students to re-read challenging portions of the text. This is equally true for material read aloud to students and for texts that students access on their own. Follow-up support should guide readers in the use of appropriate strategies and habits when encountering places in the text where they might struggle, including pointing students back to the text with teacher support when they are confused or run into vocabulary problems. Extra textual scaffolding prior to and during the first read should focus on words that are essential to a basic understanding and that students are not likely to know or be able to determine from context. As a preferred option for read-alouds, teachers should be directed to read aloud materials themselves, rather than listening along with their students to the text read by a recorded voice. Texts and the questions asked of students also should be selected and ordered so that they bootstrap onto each other. In short, prereading activities related to the text should be such that the text itself is the focus of the instruction and children are able to appreciate and get a sense of the selection as a whole.
3. ***Rather than focusing on general strategies and questions disconnected from texts, strategies and questions are cultivated in the context of reading specific texts.*** Close and careful reading must be at the heart of classroom activities and not be consigned to the margins when completing assignments. Practices such as organizing instructional units around broad, abstract themes like "traditions" or "our changing world" can be hard to develop and even harder for students to grasp. Such broad themes can invite teachers and readers to have general conversations rather than focusing reading on the specifics, drawing evidence from the text, and gleaning meaning from it. In addition, discussion of reading strategies must take its rightful place *in service* of reading comprehension, not as a separate body of material. Reading strategies are a tool for — not the point of — reading instruction. Appropriate strategies, to be effective, should be introduced and exercised only when they help clarify a specific part of a text and are dictated by specific features of a text (especially to assist with understanding more challenging sections). Over time, through supportive discussion, interaction, and reflection, students will learn to internalize

the purpose of reading strategies in pursuit of the ultimate goal: helping them understand what they have read.

4. ***Reading selections are by design centrally located within materials.*** The reading selections in either the teachers' guides or the students' editions of curriculum materials should be easily found and put at the center of the layout. The text should be the clear focus of student and teacher attention. Surrounding materials should be thoughtfully considered and justified as essential before being included. That is, the text should be central, and surrounding materials should be included only when necessary, so as not to distract from the text itself.
5. ***Materials offer assessment opportunities that genuinely measure progress.*** Aligned materials, therefore, should guide teachers to provide scaffolding and support to students but also gradually remove those supports by including tasks that require students to demonstrate their independent capacity to read and write in every domain at the appropriate level of complexity and sophistication. Activities used for assessment should clearly denote what standards are being emphasized, and materials should offer frequent and easily implemented assessments, including systems for record keeping and follow-up.

CONCLUSION: TRANSPARENT RESEARCH AND PRACTICE BASE

Curriculum offered as an excellent match for the Common Core State Standards should produce evidence of its usability and efficacy with a full range of students, including English language learners. In all materials, principles of reading acquisition are explained, instructions to teachers and students are clear and concise, and the relationship between tasks and the expected learning outcome is clear and placed in close proximity to the task directions.

Curriculum materials must also have a clear and documented research base. This evidence should be offered to the teacher in clear, concise prose at appropriate points in the instructional materials (e.g., when vowel digraphs are being taught, a "best practices" discussion could be offered to the teacher; when fluency activities are introduced, the research base for fluency's role in reading proficiency and how to achieve fluency in students could be presented to instructors).

Publishers' Criteria for the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts and Literacy, Grades 3–12

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INTRODUCTION

Developed by the authors of the Common Core State Standards, these criteria are designed to guide publishers and curriculum developers as they work to ensure alignment with the standards in English language arts (ELA) and literacy for history/social studies, science, and technical subjects.

The criteria articulated below concentrate on the most significant elements of the Common Core State Standards and lay out their implications for aligning materials with the standards. These guidelines are not meant to dictate classroom practice but rather to ensure that teachers receive effective tools. They are intended to direct curriculum developers and publishers to be purposeful and strategic in both what to include and what to exclude in instructional materials. By underscoring what matters most in the standards, the criteria illustrate what shifts must take place in the next generation of curricula, including paring away elements that distract or are at odds with the Common Core State Standards.

At the heart of these criteria are instructions for shifting the focus of literacy instruction to center on careful examination of the text itself. In aligned materials, work in reading and writing (as well as speaking and listening) must center on the text under consideration. The standards focus intently on students reading closely to draw evidence from the text and are emphatic about students reading texts of adequate range and complexity. The criteria outlined below therefore revolve around the texts that students read and the kinds of questions students should address as they write and speak about them.

The standards and these criteria sharpen the focus on the close connection between comprehension of text and acquisition of knowledge. While the link between comprehension and knowledge in reading science and history texts is clear, the same principle applies to all reading. The criteria make plain that developing students' prowess at drawing knowledge from the text itself is the point of reading. Reading well means gaining the maximum insight or knowledge possible from each source. Student knowledge drawn from the text is demonstrated when the student uses evidence from the text to support a claim about the text. Hence evidence and knowledge link directly to the text.

DOCUMENT ORGANIZATION

This document has two parts: The first articulates criteria for ELA materials in grades 3–12 and the second for history/social studies, science, and technical materials in grades 6–12. Each part contains sections discussing the following key criteria:

I. Text Selection

1. Text Complexity
2. Range and Quality of Texts

II. Questions and Tasks

1. High-Quality Text-Dependent Questions and Tasks
2. Cultivating Students' Ability To Read Complex Texts Independently

III. Academic Vocabulary

IV. Writing to Sources and Research

1. Writing to Sources — a Key Task
2. Extensive Practice with Short, Focused Research Projects

The criteria for ELA materials in grades 3–12 have one additional section:

V. Additional Key Criteria for Student Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking

1. Reading Complex Texts with Fluency
2. Increasing Focus on Argument and Informative Writing
3. Engaging in Academic Discussions
4. Using Multimedia and Technology Skillfully
5. Covering the Most Significant Grammar and Language Conventions

ELA Curricula, Grades 3–12

I. Text Selection

1. **Text Complexity:** The Common Core State Standards require students to read increasingly complex texts with increasing independence as they progress toward career and college readiness.

- A. ***Texts for each grade align with the complexity requirements outlined in the standards.*** Reading Standard 10 outlines the level of text complexity at which students need to demonstrate comprehension in each grade. (Appendix A in the Common Core State Standards gives further information on how text complexity can be measured.)¹ Research makes clear that the complexity levels of the texts students are presently required to read are significantly below what is required to achieve college and career readiness. Far too often, students who have fallen behind are given only less complex texts rather than the support they need to read texts at the appropriate level of complexity. The Common Core State Standards hinge on students encountering appropriately complex texts at each grade level to develop the mature language skills and the conceptual knowledge they need for success in school and life. Instructional materials should also offer advanced texts to provide students at every grade with the opportunity to read texts beyond their current grade level to prepare them for the challenges of more complex text.
- B. ***All students, including those who are behind, have extensive opportunities to encounter and comprehend grade-level text as required by the standards.*** Materials aligned with the Common Core State Standards must provide extensive opportunities for all students to engage with sufficiently complex text, although some will need more scaffolding to do so. Curriculum developers and teachers have the flexibility to build progressions of more complex text within grade-level bands that overlap to a limited degree with earlier bands (e.g., grades 4–5 and grades 6–8). In addition to classroom work on texts at their own grade level, some students may need further instruction, which could include approaches such as instruction on grade-level texts, fluency practice, vocabulary building, and additional practice with texts from the previous grade band. However, this additional work should not replace extensive classroom practice with texts at or above grade level, and all intervention programs should be designed to accelerate students rapidly toward independent reading of grade-level text.

Some percentage of students will enter grade 3 or later grades without command of foundational reading skills such as decoding. For these students, it is essential that there are age appropriate materials to ensure that they have extensive training and practice in the foundational reading skills required to achieve fluency and comprehension. The K-2 publisher's criteria

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more fully articulates the essential foundation skills all students need to decode in order to become fluent readers and comprehend text.

- C. ***Shorter, challenging texts that elicit close reading and re-reading are provided regularly at each grade.*** The study of short texts is particularly useful to enable students at a wide range of reading levels to participate in the close analysis of more demanding text. The Common Core State Standards place a high priority on the close, sustained reading of complex text, beginning with Reading Standard 1. Such reading emphasizes the particular over the general and strives to focus on what lies within the four corners of the text. It often requires compact, short, self-contained texts that students can read and re-read deliberately and slowly to probe and ponder the meanings of individual words, the order in which sentences unfold, and the development of ideas over the course of the text.
 - D. ***Novels, plays, and other extended readings are also provided with opportunities for close reading as well as research.*** Students should also be required to read several longer texts each year. Discussion of extended or longer texts should span the entire text while also creating a series of questions that demonstrate how careful attention to specific passages within the text provide opportunities for close reading. Students should also be required to demonstrate that they are able to read larger volumes of material and extract knowledge and insight.
 - E. ***Additional materials markedly increase the opportunity for regular independent reading of texts that appeal to students' interests to develop both their knowledge and joy in reading.*** These materials should ensure that all students have daily opportunities to read texts of their choice on their own during and outside of the school day. Students should have access to a wide range of materials on a variety of topics and genres. These texts should enable students to read broadly and widely to build their knowledge and experience. Materials will need to include texts at students' own reading level as well as texts with complexity levels that will challenge and motivate students. In alignment with the standards and to acknowledge the range of students' interests, these materials should include informational texts and literary nonfiction as well as literature. A wide variety of formats can also engage a wider range of students, such as high-quality newspaper and magazine articles as well as information-rich websites.
2. **Range and Quality of Texts:** The Common Core State Standards require a greater focus on informational text in elementary school and literary nonfiction in ELA classes in grades 6–12.
- A. ***Grades 3–5: Literacy programs include texts that are 50 percent literature and 50 percent informational.*** Achieving the appropriate balance between literary and informational text in the next generation of materials requires a significant shift in early literacy materials and instructional time so that equal time and weight are given to scientific and historical text and to literary text. (See p. 31 of the standards for details on how literature and informational texts are defined.) In addition, to develop reading comprehension for *all* readers, as well as build vocabulary, the selected

informational texts should build a coherent body of knowledge both within and across grades. (The example of “The Human Body” on p. 33 of the Common Core State Standards offers one approach.)²

- B. *Grades 6–12: ELA programs include substantially more literary nonfiction.*** The Common Core State Standards require aligned ELA curriculum materials in grades 6–12 to include a blend of literature (fiction, poetry, and drama) and a substantial sampling of literary nonfiction, including essays; speeches; opinion pieces; biographies; journalism; and historical, scientific, or other documents written for a broad audience. (See p. 57 of the standards for more details.) Most ELA programs and materials designed for them will need to increase substantially the amount of literary nonfiction they include. The standards emphasize arguments (such as those in the Founding Documents) and other literary nonfiction that is built on informational text structures rather than narrative literary nonfiction that are structured as stories (such as memoirs or biographies). Of course, literary nonfiction extends well beyond historical documents to include the best of nonfiction written for a broad audience on a wide variety of topics, such as science, contemporary events and ideas, nature, and the arts. (Appendix B of the Common Core State Standards provides several examples of high-quality literary nonfiction.)
- C. *Quality of the suggested texts is high — they are worth reading closely and exhibit exceptional craft and thought or provide useful information.*** Given the emphasis of the Common Core State Standards on close reading, the texts selected should be worthy of close attention and careful re-reading for understanding. To become career and college ready, students must grapple with a range of works that span many genres, cultures, and eras and model the kinds of thinking and writing students should aspire to in their own work. (See Appendix B of the standards for grade-specific examples of texts.)
- D. *Specific texts or text types named in the standards are included.*** At specific points, the Common Core State Standards require certain texts or types of texts. In grades 9–12, the Founding Documents, selections from American literature and world literature, a play by Shakespeare, and an American drama are all required. In early grades, students are required to study classic myths and stories, including works representing diverse cultures. Aligned materials for grades 3–12 should set out a coherent selection and sequence of texts (of sufficient complexity and quality) to give students a well-developed sense of bodies of literature (like American literature or classic myths and stories) as part of becoming college and career ready.
- E. *Within a sequence or collection of texts, specific anchor texts are selected for especially careful reading.*** Often in research and other contexts, several texts will be read to explore a topic. It is essential that such materials include a selected text or set of texts that can act as cornerstone or

² The note on the range and content of student reading in K–5 (p. 10) states: “By reading texts in history/social studies, science, and other disciplines, students build a foundation of knowledge in these fields that will also give them background knowledge to be better readers in all content areas in later grades. Students can only gain this foundation when the curriculum is intentionally and coherently structured to develop rich content knowledge within and across grades.”

anchor texts that repay careful study. These anchor texts provide essential opportunities for students to spend the time and care required for careful reading and to demonstrate in-depth comprehension of a specific source or sources.

II. Questions and Tasks

1. **High-Quality Text-Dependent Questions and Tasks:** Among the highest priorities of the Common Core State Standards is that students be able to read closely and gain knowledge from texts.

A. *A significant percentage of questions and tasks are text dependent.*

Aligned curriculum materials should include rigorous text-dependent questions that require students to demonstrate that they not only can follow the details of what is explicitly stated but also are able to make valid claims that square with all the evidence in the text. Text-dependent questions can be answered only by careful scrutiny of the text and specifically by referring to evidence from the text itself to support the response. They do not require information or evidence from outside the text or texts; they establish what follows and what does not follow from the text itself. Eighty to 90 percent of the Reading Standards in each grade require text-dependent analysis; accordingly, aligned curriculum materials should have a similar percentage of text-dependent questions. A text-dependent approach can and should be applied to building knowledge from multiple sources as well as making connections between texts and learned material, according to the principle that each source be read and understood carefully.

- B. *High-quality sequences of text-dependent questions elicit sustained attention to the specifics of the text and their impact.*** The sequence of questions should cultivate student mastery of the specific ideas and illuminating particulars of the text. High-quality text-dependent questions will often move beyond what is directly stated to require students to make nontrivial inferences based on evidence in the text. Questions aligned with Common Core State Standards should demand close attention to the text to answer fully. An effective set of questions might begin with relatively simple questions requiring attention to specific words, details, and arguments and then move on to explore the impact of those specifics on the text as a whole. Good questions will often linger over specific phrases and sentences to ensure careful comprehension. Effective question sequences will build on each other to ensure that students learn to stay focused on the text so they can learn fully from it.

- C. *Questions and tasks require the use of textual evidence, including supporting valid inferences from the text.*** The Common Core State Standards require students to become more adept at drawing evidence from the text and explaining that evidence orally and in writing. Aligned curriculum materials should include explicit models of a range of high-quality evidence-based answers to questions — samples of proficient student responses — about specific texts from each grade. Questions should require students to demonstrate that they follow the details of what is explicitly stated and are able to make nontrivial inferences beyond what is explicitly stated in the text

to what logically follows from the evidence in the text. Evidence will play a similarly crucial role in student writing, speaking, and listening, as an increasing command of evidence in texts is essential to making progress in reading as well as the other literacy strands.

- D. ***Questions and tasks require careful comprehension of the text before asking for further connections, evaluation, or interpretation.*** The Common Core State Standards call for students to demonstrate a careful understanding of what they read before engaging their opinions, appraisals, or interpretations. Aligned materials should therefore require students to demonstrate that they have followed the details and logic of an author's argument before they are asked to evaluate the thesis or compare the thesis to others. When engaging in critique, materials should require students to return to the text to check the quality and accuracy of their evaluations and interpretations. Students can and should make connections between texts, but this activity must not supersede the close examination of each specific text. Often, curricula surrounding texts leap too quickly into broad and wide-open questions of interpretation before cultivating command of the details and specific ideas in the text. Productive connections and comparisons should bring students back to careful reading of specific texts.
- E. ***Questions and tasks attend to analyzing the arguments and information at the heart of informational text in grades K–5 and literary nonfiction in grades 6–12.*** As previously stated, the Common Core State Standards emphasize the reading of more informational text in grades K–5 and more literary nonfiction in grades 6–12. This emphasis mirrors the Writing Standards that focus on students' abilities to marshal an argument and write to inform or explain. The shift in both reading and writing constitutes a significant change from the traditional focus in ELA classrooms on narrative text or the narrative aspects of literary nonfiction (the characters and the story) toward more in-depth engagement with the informational and argumentative aspects of these texts. While the English teacher is not meant to be a content expert in an area covered by the text, curriculum materials should guide teachers and students to demonstrate careful understanding of the information developed in the text. For example, in a narrative with a great deal of science, teachers and students should be required to follow and comprehend the scientific information as presented by the text. Likewise, it is just as essential for teachers and students to follow the details of an argument and reasoning in literary nonfiction as it is for them to attend to issues of style.

- 2. **Cultivating Students' Ability To Read Complex Texts Independently:** Among the highest priorities of the Common Core State Standards is a requirement that students be able to demonstrate their independent capacity to read at the appropriate level of complexity and depth.

- A. ***Scaffolds enable all students to experience the complexity of the text, rather than avoid it.*** Many students will need careful instruction — including effective scaffolding — to enable them to read at the level of text complexity required by the Common Core State Standards. However, the scaffolding should not preempt or replace the text by translating its contents for students

or telling students what they are going to learn in advance of reading the text; that is, the scaffolding should not become an alternate, simpler source of information that diminishes the need for students to read the text itself carefully. Effective scaffolding aligned with the standards should result in the reader encountering the text on its own terms, with instructions providing helpful directions that focus students on the text. Follow-up support should guide the reader when encountering places in the text where he or she might struggle. Aligned curriculum materials therefore should explicitly direct students to re-read challenging portions of the text and offer instructors clear guidance about an array of text-based scaffolds. When productive struggle with the text is exhausted, questions rather than explanations can help focus the student's attention on key phrases and statements in the text or on the organization of ideas in the paragraph.

- B. *Rather than focusing on general strategies and questions disconnected from texts, strategies should be cultivated in the context of reading specific texts.*** Far too much of existing curriculum focuses on either decontextualized strategies or front loading instructions so that reading the text is no longer the essential part of understanding and learning. Practices such as framing a big question or theme in advance of reading or previewing a text may in fact rob students of the rich discoveries and intellectual joy of encountering the way an author sets the agenda and unfolds ideas as well as details. Discussion of specific reading techniques should occur when and if they illuminate specific aspects of a text. They should be embedded in the activity of reading the text rather than being taught as a separate body of material. By reading several challenging texts, students should build an infrastructure that enables them to approach new challenging texts with confidence and stamina.
- C. *Design for whole-group, small-group, and individual instruction cultivates student responsibility and independence.*** It is essential that questions, tasks, and activities be designed to ensure that all students are actively engaged in reading. Writing about text is an effective way to elicit this active engagement, so reading materials should provide effective ongoing prompts for students to analyze texts in writing. Instructional materials should be designed to devote sufficient time in class to students encountering text without scaffolding, as they often will in college- and career-ready environments. A significant portion of the time spent with each text should provide opportunities for students to work independently within and outside of class on analyzing the text because this independent analysis is required by the standards.
- D. *Instructional design cultivates student interest and engagement in reading rich text carefully.*** A core challenge in developing instructional materials is to construct questions and tasks that motivate students to read inquisitively and carefully. Questions should focus on illuminating specifics of the text that “pay off” in a deeper understanding, rewarding careful reading. Questions should not be random but should build toward deeper understanding. Questions also should not be overly general or schematic — they should show attention to the specifics of the work and cultivate student

appreciation for what is beautiful, insightful, or special in a piece of writing that makes it worth reading carefully.

- E. *Materials make the text the focus of instruction by avoiding features that distract from the text.*** Teachers' guides or students' editions of curriculum materials should highlight the reading selections. Everything included in the surrounding materials should be thoughtfully considered and justified before being included. That is, the text should be central, and surrounding materials should be included only when necessary, so as not to distract from the text itself. Instructional support materials should focus on questions that engage students in becoming interested in the text. Rather than being consigned to the margins when completing assignments, close and careful reading must be an absolutely essential and central part of classroom activities. Given the focus of the Common Core State Standards, publishers should be extremely sparing in offering activities that are not text based. Existing curricula will need to be revised substantially to focus classroom time on students and teachers practicing reading, writing, speaking, and listening in direct response to high-quality text.

III. Academic Vocabulary

Materials focus on academic vocabulary prevalent in complex texts throughout reading, writing, listening, and speaking instruction. Academic vocabulary (described in more detail as Tier 2 words in Appendix A of the Common Core State Standards) includes those words that readers will find in all types of complex texts from different disciplines. Often, curricula ignore these words and pay attention only to the technical words that are unique to a discipline. Materials aligned with the Common Core State Standards should help students acquire knowledge of general academic vocabulary because these are the words that will help them access a wide range of complex texts.

Aligned materials should guide students to gather as much as they can about the meaning of these words from the context of how the words are being used in the text, while offering support for vocabulary when students are not likely to be able to figure out their meanings from the text alone. As the meanings of words vary with the context, the more varied the context provided to teach the meaning of a word is, the more effective the results will be (e.g., Texas was admitted to the union; he admitted his errors; admission was too expensive). In alignment with the standards, materials should also require students to explain the impact of specific word choices on the text.

IV. Writing to Sources and Research

- 1. Writing to Sources — a Key Task:** The Common Core State Standards require students not only to show that they can analyze and synthesize sources but also to present careful analysis, well-defended claims, and clear information through their writing. Several of the Writing Standards, including most explicitly Standard 9, require students to draw evidence from a text or texts to support analysis, reflection, or research. Materials aligned with the Common Core State Standards should give students extensive opportunities to write in response to sources throughout grade-level materials.

2. **Extensive Practice with Short, Focused Research Projects:** Writing Standard 7 emphasizes that students should conduct several short research projects in addition to more sustained research efforts. Materials should require several of these short research projects — typically taking roughly a week and occurring at a minimum quarterly — to enable students to repeat the research process many times and develop the expertise needed to conduct research independently. A progression of shorter research projects also encourages students to develop expertise in one area by confronting different aspects of the same topic as well as more complex texts and source materials on that topic.

V. Additional Key Criteria for Student Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking

1. **Reading Complex Text with Fluency:** Fluency describes the pace and accuracy with which students read — the extent to which students adjust the pace, stress, and tone of their reading to respond to the words in the text. Often, students who are behind face fluency challenges and need more practice reading sufficiently complex text. Materials aligned with the Common Core State Standards should draw on the connections between the Speaking and Listening Standards and the Reading Standards on fluency to provide opportunities for students to develop this important skill (e.g., rehearsing an oral performance of a written piece has the built-in benefit of promoting reading fluency).
2. **Increasing Focus on Argument and Informative Writing:** While narrative writing is given prominence in early grades, as students progress through the grades the Common Core State Standards increasingly ask students to write arguments or informational reports from sources. As a consequence, less classroom time should be spent in later grades on personal writing in response to decontextualized prompts that ask students to detail personal experiences or opinions. The Common Core State Standards require that the balance of writing students are asked to do must parallel the balance assessed on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP):
 - In elementary school, 30 percent of student writing should be to argue, 35 percent should be to explain/inform, and 35 percent should be narrative.
 - In middle school, 35 percent of student writing should be to write arguments, 35 percent should be to explain/inform, and 30 percent should be narrative.
 - In high school, 40 percent of student writing should be to write arguments, 40 percent should be to explain/inform, and 20 percent should be narrative.

These forms of writing are not strictly independent; for example, arguments and explanations often include narrative elements, and both informing and arguing rely on using information or evidence drawn from texts.

3. **Engaging in Academic Discussions:** In accordance with the Speaking and Listening Standards, materials aligned with the Common Core State Standards should show teachers how to plan engaging discussions around grade-level topics and texts that students have studied and researched in advance. Speaking and listening prompts and questions should offer opportunities for students to share preparation, evidence, and research. Materials should highlight strengthening students' listening skills as well as their ability to respond to and challenge their peers with relevant follow-up questions and evidence.

- 4. Using Multimedia and Technology Skillfully:** The Common Core State Standards require students to compare the knowledge they gain from reading texts to the knowledge they gain from other multimedia sources, such as video. The Standards for Reading Literature specifically require students to observe different productions of the same play to assess how each production interprets evidence from the script. Materials aligned with the Common Core State Standards therefore should use multimedia and technology in a way that engages students in absorbing or expressing details of the text rather than becoming a distraction or replacement for engaging with the text.
- 5. Covering the Most Significant Grammar and Language Conventions:** The Language Standards provide a focus for instruction each year to ensure that students gain adequate mastery of the essential “rules” of standard written and spoken English. They also push students to learn how to approach language as a matter of craft so they can communicate clearly and powerfully. In addition to meeting each year’s grade-specific standards, students are expected to retain and further develop skills and understandings mastered in preceding grades. Thus, aligned materials should demonstrate that they explicitly and effectively support student mastery of the full range of grammar and conventions as they are applied to increasingly sophisticated contexts. The materials should also indicate when students should adhere to formal conventions and when they are speaking and writing for a less formal purpose.

CONCLUSION: EFFICACY OF ALIGNED MATERIALS

Curriculum materials must have a clear and documented research base. It can be surprising which questions, tasks, and instructions provoke the most productive engagement with text, accelerate student growth, and deepen instructor facility with the materials. The most important evidence is that the curriculum accelerates student progress toward career and college readiness. A great deal of the material designed for the standards will by necessity be new, but as much as possible the work should be developed and refined through actual testing in classrooms. Publishers should provide a clear research plan for how the efficacy of their materials will be assessed and improved over time. Revisions should be based on evidence of actual use and results with a wide range of students, including English language learners.

Curriculum offered as an excellent match for the Common Core State Standards should produce evidence of its usability and efficacy with a full range of students, including English language learners.

History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects Literacy Curricula, Grades 6–12

INTRODUCTION

This brief addendum to the publishers' criteria for ELA grades 3–12 focuses on the portions of those criteria most relevant to materials in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects. In the list that follows, we restate several of the key points from the ELA criteria as they relate to these content areas and add others that are particularly significant. As was the case with ELA, what follows is not an exhaustive list but the most significant elements of the Common Core State Standards to be mindful of when revising and developing aligned materials.

Meeting the demands of the Literacy Standards requires substantially expanding the literacy requirements in history/social studies as well as in science and technical subjects. The adoption of the Literacy Standards in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects therefore requires several significant shifts in these curricula. Specifically, in alignment with NAEP, the standards require that in grades 6–12, student reading across the curriculum must include a balance of texts that is one-third literary, one-third history/social studies, and one-third science. Specific standards (pp. 60–66) define the actual literacy skills for which history/social studies, science, and technical teachers are responsible. (Appendix B of the Common Core State Standards contains a sampling of texts of appropriate quality and complexity for study in these disciplines.)

I. Text Selection

1. **Text Complexity:** The Common Core State Standards require students to read increasingly complex texts with increasing independence as they progress toward career and college readiness.

- A. ***Texts align with the complexity requirements outlined in the standards.***

Reading Standard 10 outlines the level of text complexity at which students need to demonstrate comprehension in each grade. (Appendix A in the Common Core State Standards gives further information on how text complexity can be measured.)³ Research makes clear that the complexity levels of the texts students are presently required to read are significantly below what is required to achieve college and career readiness. Far too often, students who have fallen behind are given only less complex texts rather than the support they need to read texts at the appropriate level of complexity. The Common Core State Standards hinge on students encountering appropriately complex texts at each grade level to develop the

³ A working group is developing clear, common standards for measuring text complexity that can be consistent across different curricula and publishers. These criteria, due out in summer 2011, will blend quantitative and qualitative factors and will be widely shared and made available to publishers and curriculum developers. It is likely that the measurement of some narrative fiction as well as poetry and drama for the time being will have to depend largely on qualitative judgments that are based on the principles laid out in Appendix A and are being further developed and refined.

mature language skills and the conceptual knowledge they need for success in school and life. Instructional materials should also offer advanced texts to provide students at every grade with the opportunity to read texts beyond their current grade level to prepare them for the challenges of more complex text.

- B. *All students, including those who are behind, have extensive opportunities to encounter and comprehend grade-level text as required by the standards.*** Materials aligned with the Common Core State Standards must provide extensive opportunities for all students to engage with sufficiently complex text, although some will need more scaffolding to do so. Curriculum developers and teachers have the flexibility to build progressions of more complex text within grade-level bands that overlap to a limited degree with earlier bands (e.g., grades 4–5 and grades 6–8). In addition to classroom work on texts at their own grade level, some students may need further instruction, which could include approaches such as instruction on grade-level texts, fluency practice, vocabulary building, and additional practice with texts from the previous grade band. However, this additional work should not replace extensive classroom practice with texts at or above grade level, and all intervention programs should be designed to accelerate students rapidly toward independent reading of grade-level text. Materials for students' independent reading within and outside of school should include texts at students' own reading level, but students should also be challenged to read on their own texts with complexity levels that will stretch them.

- 2. Range and Quality of Texts:** The Common Core State Standards require a keen focus on informational text.

- A. *Curricula provide texts that are valuable sources of information.*** Informational texts in science, history, and technical subjects may or may not exhibit literary craft, but they should be worth reading as valuable sources of information to gain important knowledge. It is essential that the scientific and historical texts chosen for careful study be focused on such significant topics that they are worth the instructional time for students to examine them slowly and deliberately to develop a full understanding. To encourage close reading, these texts should be short enough to enable thorough examination on a regular basis. Students should also be required to assimilate larger volumes of content-area text to demonstrate college and career readiness. Discussion of extended or longer texts should span the entire text while also creating a series of questions that demonstrate how careful attention to specific passages within the text provides opportunities for close reading. Students should also be required to demonstrate that they are able to read larger volumes of material across sources and extract knowledge and insight.
- B. *Curricula include opportunities to combine quantitative information derived from charts, graphs, and other formats and media with information derived from text.*** An important part of building knowledge in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects is integrating information drawn from different formats and media. For example, the Reading Standards require students to integrate the knowledge they gain

from quantitative data with information they gain from words either within a single text or across several sources. For example, materials aligned with the Common Core State Standards should require students to compare their own experimental results to results about which they have read and integrate information from video or other media with what they learn from text.

II. Questions and Tasks

1. **High-Quality Text-Dependent Questions and Tasks:** Among the highest priorities of the Common Core State Standards is that students be able to read closely and gain knowledge from texts.

A. *Curricula provide opportunities for students to gain knowledge through careful reading of a specific text or texts.* As in the ELA Reading Standards, the large majority of the Literacy Standards for History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects require that aligned curricula include high-quality questions and tasks that are text dependent. Such questions should encourage students to “read like a detective” by prompting relevant and central inquiries into the meaning of the source material that can be answered only through close attention to the text. The Literacy Standards therefore require students to demonstrate their ability to follow the details of what is explicitly stated, make valid inferences that logically follow from what is stated, and draw knowledge from the text. Materials should design opportunities for close reading of selected passages from extended or longer texts and create a series of questions that demonstrate how close attention to those passages allows students to gather evidence and knowledge from the text. This text-dependent approach can and should be applied to building knowledge from the comparison and synthesis of multiple sources in science and history. Each source must be read and understood carefully before moving to additional sources. It bears noting that science includes many nontext sources such as experiments, observations, and discourse around these scientific activities. These sources deserve an analogous “close reading” in themselves as integrating knowledge from each careful reading of such sources generates important knowledge in science.

B. *All activities involving text require that students demonstrate increasing mastery of evidence drawn from text.* The Common Core State Standards require students to become more adept at drawing evidence from the text and explaining that evidence orally and in writing. Aligned curriculum materials should include explicit models of a range of high-quality evidence-based answers to questions — samples of proficient student responses — about specific texts from each grade. Questions should require students to demonstrate that they follow the details of what is explicitly stated and are able to make nontrivial inferences beyond what is explicitly stated in the text to what logically follows from the evidence in the text.

C. *Questions and tasks require careful comprehension of the text before asking for further connections, evaluation, and interpretation.* The Common Core State Standards call for students to demonstrate a careful

understanding of what they read before engaging their opinions, appraisals, or interpretations. Aligned materials should therefore require students to demonstrate that they have followed the details and logic of an author's argument before they are asked to evaluate the thesis or compare the thesis to others. Before students are asked to go beyond the text and apply their learning, they should demonstrate their grasp of the specific ideas and details of the text.

2. **Cultivating Students' Ability To Read Complex Texts Independently:** Among the highest priorities of the Common Core State Standards is a requirement that students be able to demonstrate their independent capacity to read at the appropriate level of complexity and depth. Aligned materials therefore should guide teachers to provide scaffolding and support to students but also gradually remove those supports by including tasks that require students to demonstrate their independent capacity to read and write in every domain at the appropriate level of complexity and sophistication.

A. *Scaffolds enable all students to experience the complexity of the text, rather than avoid it.* Many students will need careful instruction — including effective scaffolding — to enable them to read at the level of text complexity required by the Common Core State Standards. However, the scaffolding should not preempt or replace the text by translating its contents for students or telling students what they are going to learn in advance of reading the text; that is, the scaffolding should not become an alternate, simpler source of information that diminishes the need for students to read the text itself carefully. Effective scaffolding aligned with the standards should result in the reader encountering the text on its own terms, with instructions providing helpful directions that focus students on the text. Follow-up support should guide the reader when encountering places in the text where he or she might struggle. Aligned curriculum materials therefore should explicitly direct students to re-read challenging portions of the text and offer instructors clear guidance about an array of text-based scaffolds. When productive struggle with the text is exhausted, questions rather than explanations can help focus the student's attention on key phrases and statements in the text or on the organization of ideas in the paragraph.

B. *Design for whole-group, small-group, and individual instruction cultivates student responsibility and independence.* It is essential that questions, tasks, and activities are designed to ensure that all students are actively engaged in reading. Writing about text is an effective way to elicit this active engagement, so reading materials should provide effective ongoing prompts for students to analyze texts in writing. Instructional materials should be designed to devote sufficient time in class to students encountering text without scaffolding, as they often will in college- and career-ready environments. A significant portion of the time spent with each text should provide opportunities for students to work independently within and outside of class on analyzing the text because this independent analysis is required by the standards.

III. Academic (and Domain-Specific) Vocabulary

The Common Core State Standards require a focus on academic vocabulary that is prevalent in more complex texts as well as domain-specific words. Academic vocabulary (described in more detail as Tier 2 words in Appendix A of the Common Core State Standards) includes those words that readers will find in all types of complex texts from different disciplines. Materials aligned with the Common Core State Standards should help students acquire knowledge of general academic vocabulary in addition to domain-specific words because these words will help students access a range of complex texts in diverse subject areas.

IV. Writing to Sources and Research

- 1. Writing to Sources — a Key Task:** Crafting an argument frequently relies on using information; similarly, an analysis of a subject will likewise include argumentative elements. While these forms are not strictly independent, what is critical to both forms of writing is the use and integration of evidence. In historical, technical, and scientific writing, accuracy matters, and students should demonstrate their knowledge through precision and detail.
- 2. Extensive Practice with Short, Focused Research Projects:** Writing Standard 7 emphasizes that students should conduct several short research projects in addition to more sustained research efforts. Materials should require several of these short research projects — typically taking roughly a week and occurring at a minimum quarterly — to enable students to repeat the research process many times and develop the expertise needed to conduct research independently. A progression of shorter research projects also encourages students to develop expertise in one area by confronting different aspects of the same topic as well as more complex texts and source materials on that topic.